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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 002057

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, AND INR/B
DOL FOR ILAB

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: UNDER SIEGE FOR MONTHS, HONDURAN MINISTER OF
EDUCATION FINALLY STEPS DOWN

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1769

[B](#). TEGUCIGALPA 1599 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Francisco Palmieri;
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (U) During a national press conference on September 13, Honduran President Ricardo Maduro announced the resignation of the embattled Minister of Education Carlos Avila Molina. Maduro praised Avila's accomplishments and noted that Avila was leaving strictly for personal reasons. Replacing Avila will be Roberto Martinez Lozano, General Manager of the National Autonomous Water and Sanitation Service (SANAA). Avila had been under pressure for months to step down due to his controversial stance against Honduras' powerful teachers' unions and his inability to successfully negotiate an end to the teachers' strike this past July, which was eventually resolved by a trio of negotiators (ref B).

[2](#). (SBU) Martinez's background is very similar to Avila's. Both hail from a private business with significant managerial experience and neither had a background in education. However, a critical difference is that Martinez is a well-established political figure who is widely acknowledged to be an effective politician. Maduro broke with past tradition in naming a non-educator as Minister of Education, preferring someone with solid managerial experience in the private sector. This irritated Honduras' traditionally powerful teachers' unions who from the beginning had a poor relationship with Avila. Although Avila was controversial, to the point of being named the worst minister in 2002 by the Honduran media, Maduro always steadfastly supported him.

[3](#). (SBU) Comment: Maduro's choice of Martinez to succeed Avila seems to reflect his desire to continue pressing for educational reform at the expense of entrenched interests in education. (Note: Although per capita spending on education in Honduras is high for regional standards, and was actually increased under Avila, Honduras continues to demonstrate poor results. The teachers' unions reluctance to reform education policy or renegotiate their high remuneration package are a considerable part of the problem (ref A). End Note.) While unpopular, Avila was willing to confront the teachers' unions (something not done in the past) and carry the water for the administration in the lead-up to the confrontations with these unions which led to the general strike (ref B). In fact, the Ministry of Education under Avila was the first to push for corruption charges to be brought against a number of high-ranking teachers' union members, causing some consternation among both the leadership and rank-and-file union members. Maduro probably expects Martinez to continue to take a hard-line with the teachers and push for needed reforms. The obvious hope is that Martinez will manage the politics more effectively. End Comment

[4](#). (U) Biographic information: Roberto Martinez Lozano was born May 16, 1951, in Arenal, Honduras. He holds a degree in civil engineering from the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), although he has primarily worked in business and government. Martinez rose as high as one of three Vice Presidents under Nationalist Party President Rafael Callejas. At one point, he considered running for president himself but he was never able to garner much support. Martinez is considered an able manager. He prefers to surround himself with capable technocrats rather than political lackeys and received high marks for his positive working relationship with the strong SANAA labor union.

[5](#). (C) Martinez was tainted with corruption charges during the late 1980s, primarily in association with his management of COPECO (the Honduran Emergency Management Agency), a notorious patronage operation at the time under Callejas, before becoming a Vice President.
Palmer